

Public Notice Regarding Privacy Breach by Contract Physician at three IHS facilities

On August 25, 2014, the Indian Health Service (IHS) Bemidji Area determined that a physician employed by a staffing company under contract with the IHS had improperly accessed protected health information from three IHS facilities. The three facilities affected are the Fort Yates Service Unit in the IHS Great Plains Area, the Cass Lake Service Unit in the IHS Bemidji Area, and the Crow Service Unit in the IHS Billings Area.

The data breach included patient names, Social Security numbers, and health information such as diagnoses, prescribed medications, and laboratory results. However, there is no current indication that the information has been used by or disclosed to any unauthorized individuals.

In accordance with regulations implementing HIPAA, the IHS has notified all persons whose information was improperly accessed. On October 17, 2014, the IHS sent letters by first class mail to the affected patients to notify them of the privacy breach. Affected patients were also provided phone numbers to call the Area HIPAA Coordinators.

As a measure of added security, the IHS is offering one year of free credit monitoring and reporting services to these affected patients. Also, to help protect against further breaches, all contract staff serving the affected Areas are being required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement stating that individually identifiable information is to be held in strict confidence.

Additionally, the Area HIPAA Coordinators have completed an investigation and the matter has been referred for appropriate action in accordance with HIPAA and its implementing regulations.

Patients who received the letter and have any questions can contact the following Area HIPAA Coordinators:

For the Cass Lake Service Unit in the IHS Bemidji Area - Phillip Talamasy at 218-444-0538 or phillip.talamasy@ihs.gov

For the Fort Yates Service Unit in the IHS Great Plains Area - Heather H. McClane at 605-226-7730 or heather.mcclane@ihs.gov

For the Crow Service Unit in the IHS Billings Area- Felicia Blackhoop at 406-247-7184 or felicia.blackhoop@ihs.gov

The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.1 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.